

Amendments to the Specification:

Page 13, amend the paragraph beginning on line 8 to read as follows:

A wafer search mechanism is provided around each of the cassettes 12 to recognize the samples in each of the cassettes when a cassette 12 is set. In the load lock chambers 4, 5 and the processing chamber 6 and the post treating chamber 7, there are provided sample lifting mechanisms 14A, 14B, respectively, so that a sample 3 can be transferred to the extensible arm 91 or 101 of each of the robots. Further, in the processing chamber 6, there are provided an electrode of an etching discharge means 13 and a sample mounting table 14C. Inside the etching discharge means 13, there is provided a sample lifting mechanism 14B. The reference character 15 is a ring-shaped gate valve.